

Testimony Regarding

**H.B. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR
Judicial Department Budget**

Appropriations Committee
Friday, February 24, 2023

Good evening, Senator Osten, Senator Winfield, Senator Berthel, Representative Walker, Representative Candelaria, Representative Callahan, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share how dedicated resources in the state budget can curb the impact of federal funding cuts to victim services organizations including The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (The Alliance).

The Alliance is the state's coalition of nine community-based sexual assault crisis services centers who provide 365/24/7 crisis interventions including hotline/text/chat services, counseling, support groups, accompaniments in hospital, police and court settings, and advocacy while navigating complex criminal justice processes. In addition, The Alliance's attorneys on our Victim Rights Center of Connecticut (VRCCT) team provide no-cost legal counsel to victims and our Post-Conviction Victim Services (PCVS) victim advocates provide victim notification and services to victims whose offenders are being supervised by the Office of Adult Probation Sex Offender Supervision Unit and the Parole Special Management Unit. For 40 years, The Alliance has provided comprehensive, victim-centered and trauma-informed services to child, adolescent and adult survivors of sexual violence across our state.

We are grateful for the support the victim services community received last year from the General Assembly and Governor Lamont, but Connecticut, like states across the country, is again facing a 50% reduction in federal Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA) dollars, which fund critical services for victims and survivors of sexual violence. As Connecticut celebrated an overall reduction in violent crime in 2021, there was an alarming [23% increase in rapes](#) which mirrors the increases in requests for services we have seen as a coalition. VOCA is currently the largest funding source for The Alliance and our member centers, and the loss of these funds would be devastating for communities across Connecticut.

We thank Governor Lamont for his leadership and proposal to allocate \$13,175,000 in FY24 to the Judicial Branch to support the reduction in federal VOCA dollars that provide grants for victim services in Connecticut and would ensure level funding for victim services in FY24 including The Alliance and our membership.

VOCA funds, which are generated from federal criminal fines and fees, have been steadily decreasing since 2018. In July 2021, President Biden signed the "VOCA Fix" bill into law to correct this problem but it is now clear that VOCA will never be as reliable or robust a funding stream as it has been in the past. The current shortfall of federal funds will create a 50% cut to victim services for all states including Connecticut. The \$13.175 million in the FY24 budget will support victim services next year, but an additional \$20 million in FY25 is needed to keep services intact long term.

This loss of funding is coming at a time when more survivors than ever, whose needs are increasingly complex, are reaching out to us for support. Over the course of the last few years, we have seen an increase in requests for services as the pandemic created circumstances that both increased sexual violence perpetration and the isolation that victims experience post-assault. The potential loss of 50% of VOCA funding during the next two years, which is the largest source of funding for The Alliance, will only compound victim and survivors' trauma with fewer advocates to provide services and less access to hotline support, support group and assistance to navigate complex systems, which are all necessary to heal.

The allocation of resources to cover the losses in VOCA funding is an investment in services that will also help to reduce future violence and crime in our state through proactive services, advocacy, and innovative collaborations across systems and disciplines. This is especially important for children who, when exposed to sexual violence, need immediate and comprehensive interventions to reduce the life-long trauma and mental and physical health outcomes associated with this abuse. Over the course of the last three years, we have seen a nearly 35% increase in children under the age of 18 disclosing being victims of sexual violence and those numbers are only increasing as our advocates continue to be welcomed back into schools and communities.

A loss of VOCA funding would be devastating for victims and survivors in our state who depend on the free and confidential services The Alliance provides to communities across Connecticut. VOCA funding supports staff across our entire coalition and a loss in funding may result in loss of staff and services including:

Child advocates who provide a cadre of specialized services to children and their families, collaborate with other systems and providers, and advocate for victims throughout the criminal justice process,

Adult advocates who provide crisis interventions, counseling, support groups, accompaniments at hospitals, police departments, and courts, and holistic service coordination and case management, including our bilingual adult advocates who provide linguistically and culturally affirming and responsive services,

Hotline services offered 365/24/7 in English and Spanish that provides uninterrupted support to survivors including safety planning, crisis counseling, and referrals to community-based and coalition-wide services,

Post-Conviction Victim Services (PCVS) advocates who provide victim notification and work collaboratively with the Office of Adult Probation Sex Offender Supervision Unit, the Parole Special Management Unit, and the Center for the Treatment of Problem Sexual Behaviors in a nationally recognized model aimed at reducing recidivism and increasing support to victims of crime,

Legal services provided by our Victim's Right Center of Connecticut (VRCCT) attorneys who provide free, high quality, trauma-informed legal services and comprehensive case management to victims of sexual violence and other violent crimes in both the criminal and civil legal justice system.

We urge you to support providing one-time, temporary funding in the amount of \$13,175,000 to the Judicial Department in our state budget to offset the loss of federal VOCA funds to ensure that we are able to continue to meet the needs of victims and survivors of sexual violence without disruption. We also urge you to look forward to FY25 and continue to find funds to ensure victims of crime are able to receive the services they need and deserve. As we continue to emerge from the pandemic it is critical that we are positioned to prioritize the needs of victims and mitigate the significant and often life-long trauma and disruptions caused by sexual violence.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your support of victims and survivors in our communities.

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